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ABSTRACT

This booklet reflects on how, in this period of change and transition, work-related adult learning should respect the unity of human beings as citizens, individuals, and workers. Section 1 deals with the most significant changes taking place in the world of work, including globalization; technological innovations; changing employment patterns; and the changing organization of work. Section 2 discusses work-related adult learning and considers investment in adult learning of workers as essential for competitiveness and growth and considers adult learning as an important commodity that is capable of making a profit. Section 3 addresses how a system of adult learning linked to the informal sector would sustain its development Section 4 focuses on the following three issues at stake in diversification and reform of national training systems: (1) devising flexible and continuous adult learning and training systems to meet the learning requirements of the entire labor market and all active populations; (2) mobilizing greater investment by building partnerships; and (3) ensuring equitable access to adult continuing education. (YLB)

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A series of 29 booklets documenting workshops held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education

5a Work-related adult learning

Work-related adult learning in a changing world

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Theme 5: Adult learning and the changing world of work
Booklet under this theme:
5a Work-related adult learning in a changing world

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Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

Work-related adult learning in a changing world

Introduction

We are experiencing tremendous changes in the area of work and witnessing major shifts from the industrial age to the world of new technologies, including information and communication technologies and biotechnology. At the same time, conventional technologies continue to be used alongside the new. This co-existence is a necessity if major social disruption is to be avoided.

In this period of change and transition work-related adult learning needs to respect the unity of humans beings as citizens, individuals and workers. People's competencies cannot be reduced simply to their vocational skills. Social relations, personal development and cultural and human values are important too, because the internationalisation of work is leading to greater integration of labour markets across national boundaries and this has strong implications for economic, social and cultural identities.

This booklet highlights the main issues raised during the workshop "Adult learning and the changing world of work" at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, held in Hamburg in 1997.

The first session dealt with the most significant changes taking place in the world of work. It was chaired by Abrar Hasan, OECD and Karamat Ali, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, Karachi, Pakistan. The panel of speakers featured Renate Peltzer, International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU), Brussels, Belgium; Prof. B.W Kerre, Moi University, Kenya; Lurliene Miller, Vocational Training Institute (HEART), Kingston, Jamaica; Maria A. Ducci, Training Policies and Systems Branch, ILO and John Lawrence, UNDP, New York, USA.

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The second session, dealing with the implications for adult education programmes, was chaired by H. Müller-Solger of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Technology, Bonn, Germany and Prof. B.W Kerre, Moi University, Kenya. Speakers were: Ikhyun Shin, Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), Republic of Korea; Barry Hobart, former UNESCO/UNEVOC consultant; The Working Group within the Committee on Educational Research in Co-operation with Third World Countries of the German Association for Education Research.

At the third session, chaired by Lurliene Miller, Kingston, Jamaica and Tony Greer, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra City, Australia, policy implications were discussed. The panel speakers consisted of: Mr Karamat Ali, Pakistan Institute of Labour; Helga Foster, Federal Institute for Vocational Training, Berlin; Ettore Gelpi, consultant, Paris and Tony Greer.

While acknowledging the changing nature of work the workshop reaffirmed the importance of the right to work. It also examined the contribution which adult learning makes to the individual's creative potential and to equal employment opportunities, thereby allowing men and women to participate in the decisions affecting their work, their lives and their livelihoods.

Although adult learning is becoming more and more an individual effort, this will have to be counterbalanced by provisions and opportunities and imparted in clear regulatory frameworks set by governments, counteracting any market distortions and addressing equity issues.

The workshop highlighted the importance of adult learning to those who have neither access to regular work nor the promise of permanent jobs in future. It was held necessary to design adult learning more thoughtfully, so as to place more emphasis on the diversity of experience, information on human rights, the vulnerability of individuals to change, and the spread of technology to support communities. Serious concern was also expressed about unemployment and precarious employment, gender inequalities, displacement of labour and dislocation of peoples. In many countries the concern is not simply one of employment but also of partaking equally in the processes of globalisation and democratisation. The workshop stimulated discussion on the role of adult learning as a tool for promoting gender democracy and for integrating all active populations, including the unemployed and those working in precarious occupations.

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The changing world of work

The changing world of work is a many-sided issue that affects all spheres of economic, social and cultural life and has tremendous relevance to adult learning. Globalisation and the dramatic innovations in technology are affecting the lives of individuals as well as societies. While global competition, communication networks, rapid investment flows and technological innovations have brought success to some enterprises, inequalities have widened and poverty persists in vast segments of society. Competition around the world is intensifying, bringing a new level of insecurity. Already in many countries active populations are expressing their dissatisfactions because of lack of jobs, poor salaries, growing disparities and increasing costs of basic social services. The future scenario suggests that hundreds of millions of people will be moving from one part of the globe to another, from one continent to another and within countries, to find food and work opportunities. The non-earning populations will in future demand a greater share in the world of wealth.

Currencies, technologies and information will be exchanged from one end of the globe to another. The implication of these transfers will be enormous. At the same time, the regulation of financial exchanges and common labour market policies are being discussed as the international markets no longer appear to be self-regulatory.

Employment patterns are also changing throughout the world along with their official definitions. Some countries will consider a person with less than 20 hours of work a week as "employed", others only if he or she has a full-time job in the conventional sense. Statistics of employment and unemployment are becoming a very important political issue.

Although globalisation may offer unprecedented opportunities to several countries there are concerns about its affects on human and social progress. All major global conferences since 1990 have given warnings about the inherent unsustainability of current production and consumption patterns, for despite economic growth there are nevertheless global and environmental constraints as outlined by the Brundtland Commission, UNCED and the Commission for Sustainable Development. A substantial proportion of the world's labour force has never had a job in the contractual or regular sense of the term. The increasing urbanisation of the world will change the patterns of life for the better and for the worse. Labour force growth in the 1990s in Africa is exceeding 5 million new entrants annually. Although new jobs are being created,

there are also new concerns regarding the environment. It is no longer possible to draw up linear scenarios.

While a section of the population in the South is starting to share sectors of modern production, parts of the Northern populations are becoming increasingly marginalised within their own national labour markets.

The majority of the world's active populations are finding other solutions to the problem of work, such as participation in the so-called informal sector, the traditional or popular economy. Within these contexts work structures and processes are characterised by employment relations that lack legally-based protection, social security and opportunities for personal development. Two-thirds of informally employed people are women. Most of them, especially in developing countries, operate often under acutely competitive conditions, at subsistence level and have few marketable skills, and little access to credit or proper marketing outlets.

The diversity in the conditions of active populations in the productive system is becoming greater, with different career paths leading from unemployment to employment and vice versa, as well as from household work to productive work. Women's participation in the formal labour market will increase, while more men will be active in household work. The ageing populations in the North and South will influence the culture of work and leisure as their numbers rapidly increase. The culture of work will also be strongly influenced by the integration of new information and communication technologies into work and education. But at the same time, work will be related to traditional culture, values, practices, codes of conduct and behaviour, especially in agriculture and craftwork. For many societies, culture including the preservation of their natural environments is an essential part of their economic survival now and in the future.

The organisation of work is rapidly changing. New information technologies have created communication methods, which ignore traditional boundaries between people, countries and regions and which are influencing the rate of production and the delivery of goods and services. The home is becoming an important place of work. The place and time of work are scattered across space and time. Managers will be obliged to take into consideration the internal and external reality of work. While new technologies can contribute to the autonomy and self-sufficiency of a part of the active populations, they are also causing another part to lose independence and autonomy through exclusion.

Work-related adult learning

At the present time work-related adult learning is a continuous and recurrent learning process. The competencies of a worker depend not just on technical knowledge and basic skills, but on attitudes, values, and behavioural patterns as well as personality traits such as initiative, creativity, adaptability, responsiveness and innovativeness. Basic skills, comprising literacy, numeracy as well as cognitive and problem-solving abilities, show the relationship between general education and work-related adult learning. General education provides the foundations for a continuing learning process throughout the entire working life.

In order to be employable or to create their own jobs people need to have skills and competencies. Employable workers mean enterprises can be supplied with the qualified, motivated and committed work-force they require to compete. In a globalised economy the competitive advantages of every country will consequently depend on having and maintaining a labour force with the necessary knowledge, practical skills and innovation. These skills will, in turn, allow people to create, keep, find, enrich and change jobs, and to obtain fair personal, economic, social and professional rewards in return. Adult learning is therefore closely linked with employability.

In this competitive environment, enterprises have to flexible. Leading employers have shown that investing in the adult learning of workers is essential for competitiveness and growth. Training, and establishing a culture of learning within the enterprise and in the community, enhances job security of employees. Learning organisations thus become a link by which employers' interests in improving performance converge with a long-term commitment to the well-being of workers.

Firms and companies are now learning that people should be working in a more meaningful way. It is increasingly being recognised that the greatest value of work is its potential to offer human beings the chance to express their creativity and identify with a product or piece of work.

Knowledge-based investment is being given equal priority to that of capital. Building the knowledge society of the future calls for a different kind of learning as well as a commitment to training and provision of employment opportunities. New markets for continuing adult learning are gradually being opened to private and public institutions as well as to NGOs, and performance incentives are being introduced for training

institutions that link training with the labour market and use enterprises as training places.

However the impact of these new attitudes is twofold: it values competent workers, but at the same time, excludes others by drawing a distinction between those who have "learned how to learn" and those who have not. It also means that employability and job security will increasingly depend on performance and that workers will have the additional responsibility for acquiring skills and pursuing their personal growth in order to remain in employment. While some workers will be privileged to have a good foundation of general education upon which to build vocational skills, others will have to rely on narrow vocational skills. For the latter group, work-related adult learning will be necessary to remain in employment.

With adult learning becoming increasingly integrated into the productive process, it is now being regarded as an important commodity itself and one capable of making a profit. Public or private institutions may therefore alter the nature of adult learning because of profit motive. Education policy-makers will therefore have a very important function to keep at least some of the adult education activities for the personal and collective development of people in general.

Adult learning and sustainable livelihoods

The majority of the world's working population is in the informal sector. Here, starting one's own enterprise represents a chance for overcoming poverty and offering possibilities of employment and income to others. Given the size of the informal sector and its importance for the survival and development of hundreds of millions of people, there is no doubt that a system of adult learning linked to it would sustain its development.

Informal avenues of work-related adult learning

Almost 85 per cent of the world's working population acquire the necessary skills for conducting an economic activity outside the formal system of education, mainly through informal avenues of adult learning. A large proportion of young adults who work in the informal sector receive their vocational training within a framework described as "informal apprenticeships". Young people are integrated into daily working life at an early stage. Learning takes place through imitation and identification. Learning processes are directly linked to production and sales, and the skills taught are necessary for the local market. However, informal apprenticeships are very often associated with the exploitation of trainees as a source of cheap labour, though this very condition perhaps provides the master with the incentive to "train".

Non-formal education, or organised education outside the formal system, is particularly effective in terms of its accessibility, participation and low cost. In contrast to the top-down approach, non-formal educational schemes attempt to carry out education at grassroots level, and aim towards greater relevance to learners and communities. It also has an identifiable clientele and sets clear learning objectives.

Informal learning may be described as the lifelong process whereby all individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and from educative resources in their environment, whether in the family, the community or on the street. This form of learning often overlaps with socialisation processes. Learning is characterised by a lack of structure, absence of an underlying curriculum and a particular timetable and takes place primarily by doing and through experience i.e. by active acquisition, rather than by receptive learning.

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Work-related abilities in the informal sector are closely related to economic survival in the context of family, community, work, physical location and social relationships. They define how someone will be able to earn money and secure a livelihood, and to market and service his products. One of the most important characteristics of the informal sector is the household-based enterprises which combine different trades with various sources of income, credit and human resource to secure daily subsistence through periods of weak economic activity. Entrepreneurs working in self-help groups generally do better than those operating individually. They gain information though their networks about new technologies, new markets and about opportunities for subcontracting.

Educational bodies operating in the informal sector must therefore be aware that learning takes place not only during the process of production, but through such activities as negotiating, searching for new markets and becoming aware of the potential of a group, network or organisation for solving problems. This means that they will have to look at the whole concept of production, including the production of ideas.

Diversification and reform of national training systems

The demand for lifelong learning for the entire labour market and all active populations, dramatically increases and diversifies the demand for training. This, in turn, requires the urgent reform of national vocational training and education systems. Three issues are at stake in this:

Reforming national vocational training and education systems

1 Devising flexible and continuous adult learning and training systems to meet the learning requirements of the entire labour market, including the informal sector and all active populations;
2 Mobilising greater investment by building partnerships;
3 Ensuring equitable access to adult continuing training.

1 Devising flexible and continuous adult learning and training systems to meet the learning requirements of the entire labour market and all active populations

In ensuring the labour force can adapt to the demands for new skills, the past distinctions between education, training and work are becoming less relevant. Reform in the workplace is leading to the development of continuous, lifelong learning which integrates what people do in the workplace with processes for developing skills and learning. Competencies required in the world of work include general knowledge and techno-professional skills, combined with a sound foundation of aptitudes, attitudes and values. Therefore the platform of solid general education is essential for subsequent training and work.

In lifelong learning formal, non-formal and informal learning are equally valuable aspects. This learning process which goes on in as many situations as possible, does not distinguish between work and learning. A lot of it takes place on the job, either in training schools set up by employers or, at the other end of the spectrum, by schools setting up their own enterprises for students to gain hands-on experience. Viewed from this perspective, the concept of adult learning becomes broader than literacy development or remedial education.

Recognition of the competencies in the informal sector

Adult education needs to build upon the abilities which people in the informal sector often have in abundance – their own knowledge, values, skills, attitudes and resources. Starting from the knowledge and experiences of the participants themselves, it should help adults to become aware of their own potential, and gain a more positive attitude to their own abilities. This is crucial if they are to have sufficient motivation to influence their working and living conditions.

In most approaches to training for the informal sector there is a tendency to neglect general abilities. Social skills which include the ability of micro-entrepreneurs to establish and maintain contacts are central to conducting a business in the informal sector. The social skills include the art of communication, empathy and willingness to co-operate. Organisational abilities include analysing and planning. Micro-entrepreneurs often attribute their success to their own ability to work hard and to a range of personality factors, dispositions and orientations (readiness to compromise, tolerate frustrations,etc.). Literacy and cognitive competencies facilitate the organisation of economic activities and are used to develop communicative skills such as giving advice, convincing and negotiating. General abilities must be related to institutional and economic influences operating in the informal sector (raw material acquisition, infrastructure and marketing, for example). They must be described and analysed in relation to their application, rather than to imported theoretical concepts.

The basic educational abilities of people in the informal sector are, at present, full of shortcomings. Adult learning should provide remedial help where such basic abilities are lacking. Instruction in the mother tongue, for example, should be complemented by one of the global languages of communication in order to promote access to avenues of further education and social resources.

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Community-based adult learning

Community-based adult learning is becoming an integral part of university adult education departments, where university-based adult educators have a chance to learn more about the socio-cultural realities around them by their involvement with migrants, minorities, indigenous communities and other groups. They can then identify the needs of casual workers and micro-entrepreneurs and help improve their employability by promoting links between business and industry, and through project work. Inducting learners into a process of lifelong learning which includes the discipline of studying and the management of time and resources is also of importance.

Supporting sustainable livelihoods

Adult learning which aims to support a sustainable livelihood should introduce the concept of vulnerability and risk management when dealing with survival strategies. It should promote the management of self-help organisations, encourage participation of groups in political decision-making, and increase negotiating and bargaining positions of disadvantaged sections and strengthen the goals of existing groups. It should take into account the economic unity of household and enterprise: appropriate skills in the basics of business management are needed to improve the ability of small enterprises to withstand crises. It should give due consideration to traditional and informal methods of acquiring vocational competencies. In addition, new information technologies should bring information to the most remote communities so that people have equal access to information on their rights, to participate in policy dialogue, to legal recourse, to protection of assets and entitlements, and to basic social services. The Human Rights' education effort has provided a base for initiating these kinds of approaches, besides pointing out some of the difficulties.

Adult education and training for women

All these efforts will go down the drain if we do not take women into account. Non-formal programmes of adult education and training for women should support their training in a wide range of programmes, including those which are aimed at empowering women, such as gender awareness training and leadership training. Trainers and teachers of women should be trained in different teaching and learning methods that promote independent and critical thinking, in addition to social and marketing skills. Lack of these skills can often be blamed on social attitudes towards women as well as a school education, both of which demand that they follow fixed norms rather than creative ideas, and memorisation of text books rather than critical thinking.

Building bridges between formal and non-formal education and training

As it becomes increasingly clear that the formal education and training systems do not always reach large parts of a population government departments in many countries are turning towards "de-formalising" the formal education system by integrating innovative and attractive components of non-formal education into formal education and training schemes.

Building bridges between formal and non-formal education is necessary in order to make formal education and training more attractive for persons and groups involved in non-formal and informal learning. On the other hand, non-formal education and traditional forms of training should be more strongly subjected to a process of certification.

2 Building partnerships

If adult learning is going to respond to the changes in the world of work, then new and complementary roles for the state and the private sector need to be defined. The goal is to bring about a culture of learning, involving government, enterprises, individuals and other stakeholders. Learners, educators – both formal and non-formal – the media, the different producers and consumers of goods and services will be actors and authors of education related to the future of work. The organisation and implementation of adult learning policies will be the result of integrated action of the above actors and designers of polices.

The World Bank's 1997 Report which deals with "The State in a Changing World" accepts that the state has a role in market-led development by providing the right environments of rules, institutions and core services. Full employment needs an enabling environment of economic and financial policies, an appropriate legal and institutional framework, a competent, effective and accountable public administration, and clear policy priorities to create and expand employment.Government-sponsored adult education schemes are often the only available choice for the vast majority of disadvantaged persons.

Governments are increasingly decentralising their responsibilities towards continuing education by sharing responsibility with regions and local authorities in many transition economies. This is necessary because it is only at the local level that trends in economic development as well as the needs of the labour market can be adequately analysed. It is also easier to organise the cooperation of stakeholders at the local level.

Sound industrial relations and well-functioning tripartite systems for consultation are the best method for ensuring that the labour market responds smoothly and efficiently to change, ensuring that steady growth and competitiveness may be achieved, and making difficult choices about the distribution of scarce resources. Tripartite governance will include government, unions, and enterprises as partners.

Unions are demanding the inclusion of basic labour standards in international trade agreements. Every working man and woman and every child anywhere has the same rights that need to be respected, and working people need to be equipped for being at the forefront of technological and structural developments. For unions it has become urgent to protect workers who do not enjoy the security of a regular employment relationship.

3 Ensuring equitable access to adult continuing education

Equity concerns are based on solidarity and social justice, and emphasise equality of opportunity for all citizens to realise their potential as human beings, and to participate actively in economic and social development. At a time of rising inequalities and increased vulnerability amongst workers, it is imperative that measures be taken to redress equity imbalances. Training should become part and parcel of a comprehensive set of broader measures geared to create and expand employment and improve its quality. The social protection of all workers should become an integral part of the opportunities for adult learning.

- Young people and new entrants to the labour market need specially designed training programmes which should include greater exposure to and familiarisation with the work environment.
- Displaced workers need to be retrained to facilitate their reintegration into the labour market.
- The unemployed, and particularly the low-skilled long term unemployed, require adult education integrated into a package of support services which will enhance their employability. The cultural and ecological dimensions should not be ignored in their adult learning.
- Home-workers, part-time workers, and those in insecure, short-term jobs should be covered by adult learning programmes.
- A significant part of further education should aim to ensure access to new technology in rural areas.
- Adult learning must address the question of gender inequalities: the majority of the world's poor people and the ones that have the most difficulty in entering the labour force are women.
- Workers in micro-enterprises and other informal sector activities, as well as small farmers and casual rural sector workers, face even greater constraints. Small productive units need training to become competitive, to link with larger enterprises as clients, suppliers and sub-contractors, thus entering into the stream of development and growth. An essential requirement is to link the training for apprentices and instructors with business development programmes. There should be a balance in micro-enterprises between learning and the striving for profit.

In several countries government policy is being directed towards compensating for the historical disadvantages of certain groups such as indigenous peoples, migrants and social disadvantaged peoples, and to developing strategies by which the position of those groups can be improved. A special form of income support is made available to indigenous Australians, for example, to improve their access to further education. The long tradition of part-time and distance learning recognises that some students have employment or family commitments or are located in rural and remote areas which makes access to tertiary education difficult.

Conclusion

Work-related adult learning offers the individual a greater potential, equality of employment opportunities, security and personal development. It will give all active populations, including women and migrant workers the skills they need for work and for democracy. Adult continuing learning is absolutely necessary to raise standards of living and increase individual freedom in transition economies and it is vital for the success of the process of transition from planned to market-oriented economies, and to democracy. Furthermore it has the advantages of being able to respond quickly to the needs of, and being accessible to, local and regional communities.

Work-related adult learning courses are particularly important for women, frequently providing support for women returning to the workforce following periods of full-time caring. They also provide a wider range of language, literacy and numeracy training critical for many educationally disadvantaged people to access formal vocational training. Young people, who often have difficulty with more formal education, find that the informality and flexibility of adult learning courses ease the path into the education and training system.

All in all, work-related adult learning has vocational, cultural, social and political dimensions and to ignore any one of these would mean an impoverishment of adult learning as well as of the workplace.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

Theme 5

Adult learning and the changing world of work

Booklet under this theme:

a Work-related adult learning in a changing world